/85 cont./

9. Meals and Eating Habits

264
262 In the morning the Surára and Pakidái eat very little, usually only one or two bananas or tubers roasted in the hot ashes. I often found that men and women set out to hunt or gather without having eaten anything. If they come across wild fruits on their wanderings, however, they help themselves generously. Small, light meals in the form of banana soup, roasted or steamed bananas, pupunha fruit, sweet potatoes, etc. are eaten at noon. Sometimes there are some leftovers from the meat of the day before. The main meal of the day does not take place until after sundown, by the light of the blazing fire. For at this time the whole family is usually assembled again, and the hunting booty which the man perhaps brought home in the afternoon or the products of the gathering by the women have been prepared. Everywhere one sees the men squatting beside the fire and waiting for food, which includes larger or smaller pieces of meat
[824] supplemented by vegetable fare. In front of them the women have spread out a few palm leaves as an underlayer for the food. The men eat first, and they also get the best pieces of meat. When they are satisfied, the women and children may start eating. Nothing is drunk during the meal, but afterwards a palm-fruit or honey drink is enjoyed.

264 Eating is done with the hands. In one hand the Indian holds a piece of roasted or boiled meat and in the other a roasted banana, a manioc flat-cake, or something similar. Intermittently one reaches into the pot and takes out another piece or cuts it off from
[415] the wooden spit or roasting rack. Soups are drunk out of gourd bowls or calabashes, just like the palm-fruit and honey drinks.

[251] If the hunters' bag was particularly good, one may observe many Indians, men, women, and children, eating all night long, for meat is preserved only before festivals. In connection with this the individual members of the family lie comfortably in their hammocks, converse, sleep a little at intervals, then fetch themselves another piece of meat from the roasting spit or rack. It is
[267] astonishing what quantities they consume during such a night. On the other hand, they are also easily able to fast for a long period of time.

2: Becher--185 E-5 (1955-1956) 1960 SQ18 Yanoama SQ18
Surára
Pakidái

/85 cont./

264 There is no feeling of modesty during eating, such as Karl von den Steinen, for example, describes for the Bakaírí /Bacairi/ (412).

412. Karl von den Steinen, 1894, p. 66.

262 On the other hand, there are food taboos for sick people, pregnant women, for girls during their first and second menstruation, and for young men in connection with their two-months' training as medicine-man helpers.

10. Tame Animals

231

As the sole, true domestic animal, there is found among the Surára and Pakidái only the dog -- hiíma. In addition, for amusement and the pleasure in animals, European cocks are kept, as well as small monkeys, porpoise-like little hamsters (Cavia leucopyga), parrots, araras, and parakeets (Conuridae).

As for the dogs, there are two barking varieties. One resembles the German shepherd dog, while the other, which is short- /86/ haired, white or spotted, looks very much like our [437] fox terrier. Well-trained hunting dogs, with which a profitable barter trade is carried on, are very lovingly cared for and are always given plenty of food, whereas the others are sometimes neglected. Basically, however, the Indians are attached to these animals also, which may be seen by the fact that every family that owns dogs, usually one or two, has made a "dog bed" behind their fire area, that is, a sleeping place for the loyal members of the household (Ill. 30) (see p. 29). Sometimes young dogs [552] are even nursed by women. If a bitch has brought forth young, all the relatives and friends ask to be given a young one later on and, upon receiving it, immediately give it a name. It may also be of interest to point out that the Indians mentioned never whistle to their dogs. Usually they call them by name or they hiss by pressing the tip of the tongue against the teeth (413).

[171]

413. Many North American Indians behave in the same way (Friederici, 1899, p. 365).

/89 cont./

12. Hygiene

515 Regular bathing, washing of the face and hands, and cleaning the finger and toe nails are unknown; this is also true for babies, who are often covered with a veritable crust of dirt. Nor do they /90/ brush their teeth or ever rinse their mouths. Yet I was never aware of an unpleasant body odor or bad breath on the Indians, and until an advanced age their teeth are dazzlingly white and sound. While hunting or gathering, however, if men and women are obliged to cross a brook or small river, they gladly utilize the opportunity to take a refreshing bath, and the same is true when female members of the tribe fetch water. A bath is greatly appreciated by children and young people, but not at all by older persons. Most men can swim quite well and teach their sons also; women and girls who swim are exceptions. As a result of occasional contacts with the palm-fiber gatherers on the Rio Aracá or with the personnel of the Indian protection post on the Demini, the Surára and Pakidái have for some time been acquainted with soap, and various Indians, predominantly children and young men and women, like to lather themselves when they take a bath. Several women had even taken to washing their hammocks now and then with soap. Thus, the cakes of soap that I carried with me were very much in demand, as were perfume and hair tonic.

[147] [145] [481] 177 515 [123]

• 264 Eating is done only with the hands (see p. 184). If the meat was very greasy and the hands are smeared all over with dirt and grease, they are rubbed off somewhat against a post and then run through the hair a few times. The eating bowls and pots, with the remains of the meal, are then put down for the dogs, who at the same time take over the work of cleaning; eating utensils are seldom washed. When they are needed for the next meal, the woman passes them over her hair a few times. If there are still a few crusts of dirt present, she spits on them and rubs them with her hand.

/90 cont./

514 [264] There is frequent belching during and after eating, and it happens not infrequently that a member of the family breaks wind, often with a loud noise, which, however, is received with happy laughter, without any damage to the appetite. Both sexes also spit a great deal as a result of the tobacco rolls which they have in the mouth almost constantly (see p. 190).

Urination is done in the immediate vicinity of the maloka during the day and in the hearth at night. Men and boys always urinate in a squatting position, just like women and girls. For their other needs they all go a bit deeper into the forest clearing during the day, or even to the edge of the forest. When they have finished, they rub the seat back and forth a few times on the ground or against a tree trunk. The mother holds small children, in case she happens to be lying in the hammock, over the edge of it. Then she wipes her hand or lower arm across its seat a few times, or, if necessary, she uses a little stick to clean it. The little heap is covered with ashes or earth and stamped into the ground by the mother. If an adult has more important business to attend to at night, he digs a small hole beside the hammock and subsequently covers it with ashes or earth. Old or sick persons do this during the day as well. The reason that [825] [776] the Surára and Pakidái do not leave the maloka at night for the aforementioned purpose is because they are afraid of snakes and jaguars, as well as of nonexí, the evil spirit which transmits sickness (see p. 211). Persistent unpleasant odors are not noticeable even in closed malokas, however, since they are dispelled by the ascending smoke of the constantly burning fire.

841 During their menstruation the women do not use anything to absorb the blood (see pp. 142/143). Pools of blood that remain on the ground are obliterated by them with their feet.

356 123 291 In general, however, the communal house is kept quite clean. One always sees men and women sweeping with a broom made of piaçaba fibers. For this work both sexes liked to put on the shirts and trousers or clothing which I had brought them as gift articles and which were otherwise not at all appreciated.

6: Vinci T-5 (1950) 1959 SQ18 Yanoama SQ18
Sanema

any moment to fall on human beings and devour them. With us Sempronio knew no fear, and he always wore a smile. He would run round our legs like a puppy, and was always ready to do things, taking on the heaviest tasks under the worst conditions. He ate with us. He ate purposefully and he went on eating. His voracity had to be seen to be believed, when you considered his slim delicate build. He ate our rations. Then he ate the special ones which the Indians prepared for themselves, and on top of that he ate an endless number of things which with great foresight he had collected on the way: grubs, honeycomb with brood cells, honey and all, small fish, worms, birds' eggs taken from the nest, frogs, young snakes, palm hearts from young palm trees—he ate everything with rapid and relentless mastication, cooking what could be cooked on the fire, and devouring the rest raw.

When he had eaten everything he would start a regular licking of his fingers, and of the leaves which might still be wet with the juices of whatever strange meats he had wrapped in them. Then he would prepare fresh delights with the innards of any game we ourselves had cooked, adding heads, claws, wing-sinews and any other odd tit-bits he could find. With a knife he would work on them like lightning. Each little delicacy was attacked at full speed, entrails were devoured, heads were crunched right up to the beak, claws cleaned of every shred of meat. Then came the time to inspect the bones we had thrown away. He split them with a knife, and if there was any marrow he could be trusted to suck it out. Finally, after a last careful lick of each finger in turn, Sempronio, the little fellow from the Shirian metropolis of Auai, would go to roost in his hammock over the fire which wrapped him in its warm blanket of heat.

6: Vinci T-5 (1950) 1959 SQ18 Yanoama SQ18
Sanema

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15. *Grubs make a tasty dish!*

16. *The fourth type of Sanumavi - the girlish.*

17. *The 'bad type' - playing a whistle made from a deer's shin-bone. Note the tribal signs on his stomach*

142
302 ←

142
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[p. 96 - E]

/451 cont./

251 The Guaika /Waica/ do not keep reserves of food. All of their foods are cooked fresh or at least within a period of two weeks from the time they are ready. Therefore, in case their conucos have a scarcity of produce, they must go to live in the forest, gathering seeds, fruits, and roots, and devoting more [628] time than usual to hunting and fishing. When another settlement has an abundance of food in a time of scarcity, it would be very fortunate to be able to live completely from this settlement instead of having to subsist from the forest.

Consumption of Food

263 No salt is consumed as such, that is, as salt properly speaking. [824] They eat wood ashes, especially the ashes of a tree called "kololi." The ashes may be eaten as they are or with hot water poured over them to obtain a tasty liquid. To this liquid, called "ubu," is added strong peppers. Platanos and other foods are dipped in the resulting sauce to flavor and ingest them.

261 Clay is also dried and eaten, especially the clay from certain nests of insects.

[862] No child may be weaned until it has learned to eat the said ashes and clay.

Earth and clean dust are also eaten. They are considered clean if they are taken from a place where a fire has recently burned, from a river bed, or from a bare spot or bank of sand which the sun has been able to purify.

• 264 Their hours for eating are as follows: Breakfast is taken shortly after sunrise, and the second turn when they come back from work in their "conucos," generally at some time near midday. They eat again near /452/ sunset. This schedule varies, being adjusted for hunting trips, moving from the settlement, etc. They eat quite a lot between meals, especially wild fruits and bananas and ripe platanos.

/452 cont./

252 Women generally roast the platanos for everyone's breakfast. At noon and in the evening, everyone cooks his own platanos. To a child of seven they might give three green platanos in [866] their skins, telling him: "Here is your dinner." The child then proceeds to cook them.

• 264 The Guaika /Waica/ in general have abundant food and eat it with pleasure. They do not look kindly upon remains of food being left. Anyone who does not lick his bowl clean after having drunk his soup of platanos is considered a prodigal.

266 The mere idea of cannibalism is rejected with horror, al-
765 though they do eat the pulverized bones of a cremated relative, after having kept them in a hermetically sealed gourd for about six months.

262 They do not eat carnivorous birds and animals, but carnivorous fish, even the caribe (piranha), are eaten with pleasure. Some [252] snakes are eaten, others not. They boil them or else they cook them wrapped in leaves upon the embers.

271 Drink, Drugs, and Excesses

The Guaika /Waica/ take extreme care concerning the water they drink. The supply of water for a settlement must be obtained upstream from all the fords which cross the stream or brook. If a Guaika finds it necessary to drink water in a place below a ford, he makes a hole in the sand of the beach and waits until water which has filtered through it gushes up. The water of the current is considered dirty, just as the water from the hole dug [415] in the beach is clean. Water is transported in gourds by the women for use in the settlement.

273 The Guaika do not prepare any alcoholic beverage.

276 Tobacco leaves are rolled up with ashes and placed in the mouth behind the lower lip. When there is a shortage of tobacco, /453/ they obtain a certain bitter root in the forest, strip the bark from it, and place it behind the lip to diminish the desire for tobacco.

11: Chagnon E-5 (1964-1965) 1968 SQ18 Yanoama SQ18

276 [412] powder as it dries, the flat side of a stone axe[8] serving as the grinding pestle. The dried, green powder, no more than several tablespoons full, is then swept onto a leaf with a stiff feather. The men then gather around the leaf containing the drug, usually in the late afternoon, and take it by blowing the powder into each other's nostrils (see Fig. 2–3). A small quantity of the powder is introduced into the end of a hollow cane tube some 3 feet long. The tube is then flicked with the forefinger to scatter the powder along its length. One end of the tube is put into the nostril of the man taking the drug, and his helper then blows a strong blast of air through the other end, emitting his breath in such a fashion that he climaxes the delivery with a hard burst of air. Both the recipient and the blower squat on their haunches to do this. The man who had the drug blown into his nostrils grimaces, groans, chokes, coughs, holds his head from the pain of the air blast, and duck-waddles off to some leaning post. He usually receives two doses of the drug, one in each nostril. The recipient usually vomits, gets watery eyes, and develops a runny nose. Much of the drug comes back out in the nasal mucus that begins to run freely after the drug has been administered. Within minutes after the drug has been blown into a man's nose, he begins having difficulties focusing his eyes and starts to act intoxicated. The drug allegedly produces colored visions, especially around the periphery [187] of the visual field, and permits the user to enter into contact with his particular *bekuru*, miniature demons that dwell under rocks and on mountains. The man begins to chant to the *bekuru* when the drug takes effect, inviting them to come and live in his chest.

245 276 The Yąnomamö also cultivate a tree, *bisiowa*, that produces hallucinogenic seeds. These are prepared in exactly the same manner as the noncultivated drug.

322 396 TROUGHS AND CANOES The Yąnomamö use the bark of another kind of tree to make a trough and a crude canoe, both of which are nearly identical in shape, size, and method of construction. The tree is beaten with clubs to loosen the bark. The bark is then removed in one piece and hauled back to the village. The ends are heated in a fire to make them pliable and folded back to make the ends of the container. They are held firm by lashing two sticks together, pinching the folded bark into a flat-nosed basin. The interior bark surface becomes the exterior surface of the soup container. If the container is to be used as a canoe, a crude framework of sticks is added to the inside, giving 501 it more stability. The craft is so crude and heavy that the Yąnomamö generally do not use it for any purpose other than the trip for which it was intended, usually a downstream trip, since it would be almost impossible to move against a current in this rough craft. It is easier to walk than to try to pole the canoe upstream. The canoe, hence, is usually discarded after it makes its maiden voyage. Another will be made when it is needed.

415 574 264 The container is pinioned to the ground with stakes if it is to be used as a soup trough. Each time a feast is held, one or more of these bark containers is made in front of the headman's house, filled with the boiled ripe plantain soup, and frequented by the hungry guests, who dip out the soup with gourd spoons. The trough is thrown on the village rubbage heap after the feast is over.

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[172] [8]They find the stone axes when they make new gardens, explaining that the spirits left them behind for the Yąnomamö to use. This area was occupied in the distant past by tribes whose relationship to the present Yąnomamö is uncertain.

11: Chagnon E-5 (1964-1968) 1968 SQ18 Yanoama SQ18

When Kaobawä's group travels, Ariwari emulates his father by copying his activities on a child's scale. For example, he erects a temporary hut from small sticks and discarded leaves and plays happily in his own camp (see Fig. 3–7). His sisters, however, are pressed into more practical labor and help their mother do useful tasks. Still, the young girls are given some freedom to play at being adults and have their moments of fun with their mothers.

But a girl's childhood ends sooner than a boy's. The game of playing house fades imperceptibly into a constant responsibility to help mother. By the time a girl is ten years old or so, she has become an economic asset to the mother and spends a great deal of time working. Little boys, by contrast, spend hours playing among themselves and are able to prolong their childhood into their late teens if they so wish. By that time a girl has married, and may even have a child or two.

A girl's transition to womanhood is obvious because of its physiological manifestations. At first menses (*yakëmaa*) Yąnomamö girls are confined to their houses and hidden behind a screen of leaves. Their old cotton garments are discarded and replaced by new ones manufactured by their mothers or by older female friends. During this week of confinement, the girl is fed by her relatives; her food must be eaten by means of a stick, as she is not allowed to come into contact with it in any other fashion. She must also scratch herself with another set of sticks. The Yąnomamö word for menstruation translates literally as "squatting" (*ne*), and that fairly accurately describes what pubescent females (and adult women) do during menstruation. Yąnomamö women do not employ tampons; they simply remain inactive during menstruation, squatting on their haunches most of the time. After her puberty confinement, a girl is eligible to begin life as a wife and take up residence with her husband.

Males, on the other hand, do not have their transition into manhood marked by a ceremony. Nevertheless, one can usually tell when a boy is attempting to enter the world of men. The most conspicuous sign is his anger when others call him by his name. When the adults in the village cease using his personal name, the young man has achieved some sort of masculine adult status. Young men are always very touchy about their names and they, more than anyone else, take quick offense when hearing their names mentioned. The Yąnomamö constantly employ teknonymy when a kinship usage is ambiguous. Thus, someone may wish to refer to Kaobawä in a conversation, but the kinship term appropriate to the occasion might not distinguish him from his several brothers. Then, Kaobawä will be referred to as "father of Ariwari." However, when Ariwari gets older, he will attempt to put a stop to this in an effort to establish his status as an adult. A young man has been recognized as an adult when people no longer use his name in teknonymous references. Still, the transition is not abrupt, and it is not marked by a recognizable point in time.

Finally, the children differ from adults in their susceptibility to supernatural hazards. A great deal of Yąnomamö sorcery and mythological references to harmful magic focuses on children as the target of malevolence. Yąnomamö shamans are constantly sending evil spirits (*Hekura*) to enemy villages. There, they secretly attack and devour the vulnerable portion of the childrens' souls (*noreshi*), bringing about sickness and death. These same shamans spend an equal amount of time warding off the dangerous spirits sent by their enemies. Children are vulnerable because their souls are not firmly established within their physical beings, and can wander out of the body almost at will. The

11: Chagnon E-5 (1964-1968) 1968 SQ18 Yanoama SQ18

drugs take effect. This usually lasts for an hour or so, after which the men bathe to wash the vomit or nasal mucus off their bodies. Kaobawä does not participate in the drug-taking, as he finds it unpleasant. Most of the men, however, do take drugs and enjoy doing it, despite the associated unpleasantries of vomiting and the pain that follows the blast of air as the powder is blown deeply into the nasal passages.

Whatever the men do for the afternoon, however, the women invariably search for firewood and haul immense, heavy loads of it to their houses just before dark.

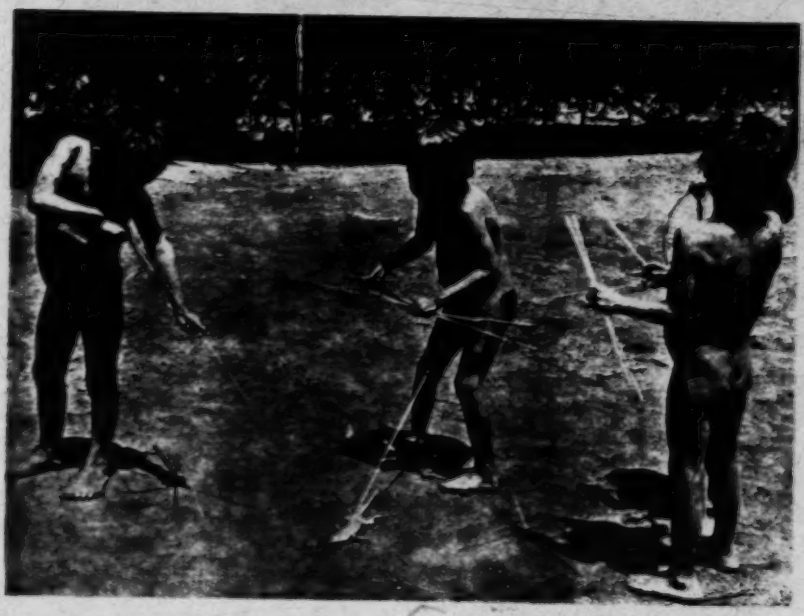

Fig. 3–8. Boys shooting tiny arrows into a lizard they have captured. The lizard is tied to a string and allowed to run around the village while the boys gleefully chase it. Here they have wounded it and are about to fill it full of arrows.

The biggest meal of the day is prepared in the evening. The staple is plantains, but frequently other kinds of food are available after the day's activities. Meat is always the most desirable food and is always considered to be in short supply. It is a happy occasion when one of the hunters bags a tapir, for everyone gets a large share of it.

It is good to share meat with others. This attitude is expressed in the sentiment that a hunter should give away most of the game he kills. One of the obligations men take very seriously is providing adequate quantities of meat for their wives and children. They genuinely abhor hearing their children cry for meat; this calls into question their abilities as hunters and marksmen, both of which are associated with prestige. Rerebawä, for example, collected a large supply of game on one trip we took together. He gave it all to his wife and children and to his wife's parents. At the evening meal he refused to

At the evening meal he refused to take a portion of the meat so that the others could have more. Later in the evening, he appeared at my hut begging for a can of sardines to satisfy his hunger for meat. He preferred to go hungry rather than risk the onus of being accused of poor marksmanship or stinginess.

Both sexes participate in the cooking, although the women do the greater share of it. Food preparation is not elaborate and rarely requires much labor, time, or paraphernalia. Spices are never used, although the salty ashes of a particular kind of tree are sometimes mixed with water to form a condiment of sorts. The food is dunked into the salty liquid and eaten.

Everyone eats in his hammock using his fingers for utensils. Some meals cannot be eaten from a reclining position, so the members of the family squat in a circle around the common dish. For example, large quantities of tiny fish are cooked by wrapping them in leaves and cooking them in the hot coals. When the fish are done, the package is spread open, and everyone shares its contents.

Animals are never skinned before cooking. They are merely put over the fire after their entrails have been removed, and roasted, head, fur, claws, and all. Most of the fur is singed off in the process of cooking. The animal is dismembered by hand. The head, particularly the head of a monkey, is highly prized because the brain is considered a delicacy. The most common meat is monkey, of which there are several varieties, so that this delicacy is enjoyed rather frequently by the Yąnomamö.

By the time supper is over it is nearly dark. The fires are prepared for the evening; if someone has allowed his own fire to go out during the day, he simply borrows two glowing sticks from a neighbor and rekindles his own hearth. The entrances to the village are sealed off with dry brush so that prowlers can not enter without raising an alarm. Before retiring to their hammocks, the Yąnomamö first sit on them and wipe the bottoms of their bare feet together. This rubs off most of the debris that has accumulated on them during the course of the day. Everyone sleeps naked and as close to the fire as possible. Despite the inevitable last-minute visiting, things are usually quiet in the village by the time it is dark.

Things are not always quiet after dark. If anyone in the village is sick, a shaman will chant to the malevolent spirits most of the night to exorcise them. Or, should anyone be mourning a dead kinsman, he or she will sob and wail long after the others have fallen asleep. Occasionally, a fight will break out between a husband and wife, and soon everybody in the village will be screaming, expressing opinions on the dispute. The shouting may continue sporadically for hours, dying down only to break out anew as someone gets a fresh insight into the problem. Once in a while someone gives a long, loud speech voicing his opinion on the world in general. Those who are interested may add their own comments, but the audience usually grumbles about the noise and falls asleep.

Status Differences and Activities

Daily activities, except those concerning gardening and visiting, do not vary much from season to season. Much of the variation that does occur is a function of one's age or sex, as was shown above.

11: Chagnon E-5 (1964-1968) 1968 SQ18 Yanoama SQ18

amoamo on other occasions, but invariably do so on the day the plantains are hung in the village in anticipation of a feast.) Every evening the men are away on their *hunimou*, the week-long hunt, the young women and girls sing and dance in the village to insure them success.

The hunters left at dawn the following morning, carrying a large supply of roasted and green plantains with them to eat while they hunted. They had picked a site some 25 miles up the Mavaca River for their hunt, as game was known to abound there. Their task was to obtain monkeys, armadillos, wild turkeys, wild pig, tapir or sloth, the only meat deemed worthy to give to guests. They would not be permitted to eat any of this game, but could consume any other game they captured, such as deer, small birds, a small species of wild turkey, or insects and fish they happened to come upon. The feast meat, however, was earmarked for the guests and could not be eaten by the hunters. On this particular hunting trip the men miscalculated the amount of food they would need to sustain them during the hunt, and one of them returned after four days to fetch more plantains. He also gave Kaobawä a report on the hunt's success, creating a small sensation in the village: They had already killed a large number of *kaibo*, a particularly large and very desirable monkey. They had also come upon a quantity of turtle eggs at a sand bar and were eating as many as they could. When they returned later, they cached the remaining eggs in my house, so as not to have to share them with the visitors.

Meanwhile, the visitors were making gluttons of themselves, and the hosts started to grumble about the large number of plantains they had already eaten. The week's supply they originally provided had been consumed in half that time, and the guests had been given permission a second time to harvest more from their hosts' gardens. This was no way for guests to behave, and it soon became apparent that they were intimidating Kaobawä's group. Still, he and his followers continued to supply them with all the food they needed, keeping their complaints to themselves. They did not want it to be known that they were worried about running short of food. Instead, they planned to conduct the feast on a scale that would be difficult to reciprocate.

The hunters returned and presented their catch to Kaobawä. It was brought to his house and placed on the ground, wrapped up in leaves. Kaobawä ignored it for a while and then slowly began to unpack it (see Fig. 4-1) while everybody watched—especially the hunters, who were quite proud of the quantity of meat they had obtained: seventeen *kaibo* monkeys, seven wild turkeys, and three large armadillos. Hunting trips are not usually this successful, but the hunters had fortunately stumbled into a large band of *kaibo* and had nearly wiped it out.

Kaobawä and his group were anxious to conduct the feast for their visitors and present them with the food, because by so doing the visitors would be obliged to leave for home, thereby ending the drain on the gardens.[2]

The feast was scheduled for the day following the return of the hunters, even though the Karohi-teri had not yet arrived. Kaobawä and his group were so anxious to rid themselves of their ravenous guests by this time that they decided to hold a separate feast for the Karohi-teri on the day following the departure of the Mahekodo-teri. This would involve a considerable amount of extra work, but they were more than willing to

[2] I have seen several instances of Yanomamö groups getting rid of visitors who have joined them semipermanently by holding a feast in their honor; when the ceremonial food is presented, the visitors are obliged to leave.

11: Chagnon E-5 (1964-1988) 1968 SQ18 Yanoama SQ18

undertake it if it meant getting rid of their first group of visitors, who, by this time, had spent nearly a week eating Kaobawä's produce.

On the morning of the feast three large pieces of bark from the *arapuri* tree were cut and brought to the village. These were made into troughs to contain the boiled, ripe plantain soup. All day long Kaobawä's younger brothers, who had returned from the hunt the day before, labored at cooking the enormous quantity of ripe plantains, pouring each boiling containerful into the trough as it was prepared.[3]

The plantains that Kaobawä had hung in his *shabono* roof a week before were now ripe. The young men who were preparing the soup would cut the bunches of plantains from the roof, split each fruit with their thumb, throw the two halves of the flesh into a cooking pot, and toss the skins onto a pile. They worked at this task from early morning until late afternoon, in addition to boiling a nearly equal quantity of green plantains, which provided the green vegetable food that customarily accompanies the presentation of meat. Yanomamö etiquette dictates that meat must be accompanied by vegetable food and vice versa.[4] It is an insult, for example, to offer someone meat without simultaneously offering a vegetable food with it. Peeling green plantains is a little more difficult than peeling ripe ones, which are very tough and brittle. The Yanomamö solve this problem, like they solve so many others, by using their teeth. Each plantain is bitten along its length several times, cracking the peel, which in turn is removed with the fingernails and further application of the dentition. On this particular occasion, two young men peeled, with their thumbs, enough ripe plantains to make approximately 95 gallons of soup, and, with their teeth, a sufficiently large quantity of green plantains to fill a dozen large pack-baskets.

In the morning on the day of the feast, Kaobawä went to the center of the village clearing where all could see him and proceeded to pull weeds. The clearing has to look presentable to the visitors, as it functions as the dancing plaza. As noted before, since Yanomamö headmen cannot directly order their followers to execute tasks such as these, they usually initiate them and hope that others will follow. By and by, a number of older men joined him, as well as a few women, and when a sufficient number of workers were pulling weeds and hauling them out, Kaobawä quietly retired to his hammock, from which he oversaw the food preparations and calculated the distribution of meat.

Excitement in the village grew conspicuously as the hours passed, and by noon there was a constant din of laughter and chatter, punctuated now and then with a shrill scream from some young man overcome with the thrill of the feast. Occasionally, the visitors would reply to the shouts, setting off a brief contest of screaming between hosts

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[3] Kaobawä's group has access to aluminum pots now and uses them extensively in food preparations. Most Yanomamö groups still use crude clay pots, although these are being rapidly replaced by aluminum ware, which is traded inland to the more remote villages.

[4] The three vegetable foods considered to be suitable accompaniments for the meat presentation are: boiled green plantains, boiled *ruaka* fruit, and cassava bread. A number of missionaries and a few scientific observers have identified the Yanomamö feast strongly with the *ruaka* fruit (Zerries 1955; de Barandiaran 1966). If it is to be identified with any food, it should be called the "plantain feast," but to identify the feast with a food that sometimes (*ruaka*) or invariably (plantains) accompanies it is to overlook the sociopolitical causes of the feast. *Ruaka* is so unnecessary to the feast that it was served at only two of six feasts I attended. In short, the Yanomamö feast is a social and political event, not a harvest ceremony, and occurs independently of the abundance or availability of *ruaka* fruit. *Ruaka* fruit ripens in February, the peak of the dry season. It is only in the dry season that feasts can be held, because travel is difficult or impossible at other times of the year. The correlation of the ripening of *ruaka* and feasting is rather more fortuitous than causal.

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The members of Lower Bisaasi-teri had joined Kaobawä's group for the feast, as they, too, were on friendly terms with the Mahekodo-teri and had benefited from the latter's hospitality after the treacherous feast in 1950. Before Kaobawä's group had separated from the Lower Bisaasi-teri, there had been one headman over the entire composite village. This was a brother to Kaobawä's father; when the groups split, the older man led the faction of Lower Bisaasi-teri, leaving Kaobawä to lead the Upper group. On this particular day, when the two groups had temporarily coalesced for the feast, the older man was conceded the honor of chanting with the visitor's delegate, Asiawä, the son of the Mahekodo-teri headman.

Ten minutes after the old visitor entered the village, Asiawä entered the clearing, touching off an explosion of wild cheering that marked the opening of the dance. He was spectacular in his bright new loin cloth, long red parrot feathers streaming from his armbands, and black monkey-tail headband covered with white buzzard down. He marched dramatically to the center of the village clearing, while all of Kaobawä's followers cheered, and struck the visitor's pose: motionless, head upward, and weapons held vertically next to his face. He stood there two or three minutes so his hosts could admire him. This gesture signified that he had come in peace and was announcing his benevolent intentions by standing where all could see him. If they bore him malice, they had to shoot him then or not at all.[5] He then marched to Kaobawä's house and was met by Kaobawä's father's brother, the temporary leader of the combined host group, and the two men immediately began to chant. This was the formal acceptance of the feast invitation by Asiawä on behalf of his entire group. They chanted for five minutes or so, bouncing up and down from the knees, now face to face, now side to side, but always lively and loud. Suddenly, they stopped, and Asiawä squatted, his back to the sun, while the host's representative retired to his hammock. The cheering died down. Asiawä squatted for several minutes before one of Kaobawä's younger brothers brought a half-gourd full of plantain soup to him and set it on the ground. He ignored it politely for several minutes, staring into the distance, holding his weapons horizontally next to his mouth. Presently, he put his weapons down, picked up the container of soup, and drained it in one draft before setting it back down. As soon as he had set it down, one of Kaobawä's younger brothers brought him a large pack-basket filled with boiled green plantains and smoked armadillo meat. Asiawä stood while the strap of the basket was placed over his head and adjusted across his shoulders so as to not crumple his headdress. Trying to look dramatic, he staggered rapidly out of the village under his burden of food, while the hosts again cheered wildly. This food was eaten by the visitors while they finished their decorating, each receiving a small portion.

Within a half-hour of Asiawä's departure the visitors had completed their decorating and had assembled just outside the entrance to the village. The men, all finely decorated, stood at the front of the gathering, while the women, girls, and young boys, also decorated, but each carrying a load of family possessions, brought up the rear. At the signal of Asiawä's father, the first two dancers burst into the village, separated, and danced around the periphery of the clearing in opposite directions, while Kaobawä's group welcomed them enthusiastically with shouts and shrill screams. Two at a time,

[5] I have a number of informants' accounts of visitors being shot down while standing in the clearing to announce their visit. Whenever I accompanied visitors to strange villages for the first time I, too, was obliged to participate in this rite and always had an uneasy feeling about it.

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the visiting dancers entered, pranced around the village periphery, wildly showing off their decorations and weapons and then returning to the group. Each dancer had unique decorations and a unique dance step, something personal that he could exhibit. He would burst into the village screaming a memorized phrase, wheel and spin, stop in his tracks, dance in place, throw his weapons down, pick them up again, aim them at the line of hosts with a wild expression on his face, prance ahead a few steps, repeat his performance, and continue on around the village in this manner, while the hosts cheered wildly. When everyone had had an individual turn, the entire group entered, danced single file around the periphery several times, and gathered at the center of the clearing, where they formed a tightly knit group. They stood motionless, except for the heaving of their chests, holding their weapons vertically. After they had stood there a few moments—in a final display of decorations—Kaobawä's followers emerged from their houses and approached the center of the village, each man inviting one or more of the visitors to his house, leading him away from the village center by the arm. As each visitor was led away, his family, watching from the village entrance, unceremoniously joined him at the host's house, bringing the family possessions along. Within a few minutes the dance plaza was deserted and the visitors were resting comfortably in their hosts' hammocks. Even in the hammocks, the Yanomamö visitors are able to put on a silent display of their finery as they lay with their legs crossed, one arm behind their head, staring at the ceiling, waiting for their hosts to feed them ripe plantain soup from the bark troughs—it is almost as if they are strutting from a reclining position.

After the guests had been given their first round of soup, the men of Kaobawä's village assembled outside the entrance and came in to dance around the village for their guests. They, too, had an opportunity to put on a display of their own decorations, after which they retired to entertain the guests.

There were three troughs full of soup in the village. The first one was emptied in the process of bringing numerous gourdsful to the some one hundred visitors (see Fig. 4-2). After they had consumed this, the guests then assembled at the second trough and began eating there. Before this trough was finished, they moved as a group to the third trough and repeated their ceremonial consumption, before returning to their hammocks to rest and regain their appetites. Approximately two hours had passed from the time the first dancers entered the village until the guests retired from the third trough of soup. They had not yet eaten all of the contents—all in all, some 95 gallons of it—but managed to do so by morning.[6]

Shortly after dark the marathon chanting (*wayamou*) began—it continued until dawn. At dawn the visitors conducted their trade and were given the baskets of "going-home food" (boiled green plantains with smoked meat. The women and children departed with the food, leaving the men behind to trade. The visitors made requests through their headman, and Kaobawä would produce the item by enjoining one of the local men to give it. The item would be thrown at the feet of the man who wanted it. He would ignore it for a while and then give it a cursory examination, throwing it back on the ground. His peers would then examine it in greater detail and extol its virtues, while the

[6]During some feasts, the ashes of the dead are mixed with the boiled, ripe plantain soup and eaten by friends and relatives of the deceased. The feast also serves as a preliminary to a raid that involves two or more villages. The sponsor of the raid will entertain his allies in a feast the day before the raiding party departs. See Chapter 5 for a discussion of the raid.

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giver would apologize for its defects. If it were a particularly poor item, just the opposite would occur; the giver would cite its not-so-obvious merits, while the recipient would draw attention to the conspicuous shortcomings. In every trade the hosts always feel as though they had been over generous, and the guests, after they depart, complain that they had not received enough. The trade was conducted in an atmosphere of efficiency, with very little argumentation. The hosts had concealed their choicest items and vigorously denied having some goods, and the guests had done likewise—sinking their prize bows in a river before arriving at feast, for example, and bringing an inferior one along in case one of the hosts asked for it during the trading. As this was the first time in some years that the two groups feasted together, there was nothing for either one to repay. Instead, the visitors asked for items *ao mosiha*—to be repaid later—and the guests did the same.

Fig. 4–2. Guests drinking boiled ripe plantain soup at a feast; the trough is made from the bark of a large tree, unapuri.

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